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ABSTRACT

The demand for paraprofessionals trained to work in the special education of the handicapped is rapidly increasing, especially due to the impact of Public Law 94-192 which requires that individualized educational programs be provided for handicapped children. To help meet this need, a model program called PEG is being developed in New Jersey. Its prime objective is the provision of a curriculum and program for the education of paraprofessional personnel in special education, and it emphasizes both the preservice study of the principles and practices of special education and the development of the competencies necessary in personal and professional skills. The program designed to be offered by a community college consists presently of four courses; two concentrate on the legal basis for the delivery of special education services and on familiarity with terminology, while the other two are intended to assist the student in self-study and skill development while on the job. Upon entry, participants are given a chart of the paraprofessional competencies which they are expected to achieve in the areas of orientation to the field, ethics, interpersonal relationships, learning atmosphere, selected skills, and descriptions of exceptional citizens. While these completed segments of the program are being field tested, it is hoped that the rest of the program will be developed. (ELG)

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FINAL REPORT

of

PROJECT PEG

1978

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July 1, 1977
Beginning Date

June 30, 1978
Ending Date

The Contractors undertaking this project were encouraged to express fully their judgments in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official funding agency positions or policies.

ABSTRACT

PROJECT TITLE Paraprofessional Training in Special Education

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FUNDED UNDER SECTION 133 OF P. L. 94-482 PROJECT BUDGET \$ 35,302

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

Use this sheet and no more than one other to type in single-spaced form a statement of project objectives, procedures that were followed, state and local priorities emphasized and the contribution of the project to vocational education.

Objectives:

The goal of the PEG project was the fulfillment of one of the most urgent needs in vocational education in New Jersey. The demand for trained paraprofessionals in special education now exceeds the supply and mandated services to the handicapped are increasingly extensive.

The training of paraprofessionals in service to the handicapped begins with the development of a model curriculum, which is the prime objective of this project. The curriculum which has been developed provides the fundamental program for all such paraprofessionals and an introduction to specific areas within the field of special education. It is intended to peg practice on principles.

Procedures:

A disseminable product has been produced as a result of the efforts of those involved in the project, especially of those of the authors of the multivolume series of manuals and workbooks in vocational training in special education. The series contains an ordered sequence of objectives and activities which compose a model curriculum. The overview of the entire curriculum has been completed, as has also two segments of the curriculum. Because of the foreshortened time span allotted to the project and in accord with the agreed upon production schedule, the current project has been completed as modified.

The director of the program, the Project Manager, and the education faculty at Burlington County College, proposed to its Board of Trustees the names and credentials of two experts in the field of special education, who were willing to undertake the project. After extensive meetings, brief writing, and documentation, the persons

Description of Project
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nominated were hired under a contract awarded as "extraordinary, unspecifiable services." Anticipating the contract Dr. M.J. Ward began designing a projected overview for four courses. Revised as further information and consultation were available, the proposed program was submitted to the faculty in education at the college and to Ted Gerhson of the Division of Vocational Education. Three additional noteworthy sources provided information for the project, namely site visits to the Vocational Curriculum Laboratory at New Brunswick and to the federal model program at the Rutland Center in Athens, Georgia, and also a consultation conference with educators and special school personnel in Burlington County meeting at the county college on March 10, 1978.

The authors of the PEG program benefited from the contributions of the educators and the services of the staff, but throughout the period of preparation it was their intelligent use of materials and diligence in pursuing avenues of approach which lead to a successful and timely completion of the stipulated project.

Priorities:

The provision of a disseminable curriculum and program for pre-service and in-service training of paraprofessionals in vocational service in special education is both a state and local priority. Positions now becoming available or already fulfilled by inadequately trained personnel are increasing, and a precise and flexible tool for training has been needed. That instrument is now provided by the completion of this project. Locally, New Lisbon State School and the Cerebral Palsy Center, as well as special education classrooms in public and private schools and agencies will be the immediate beneficiaries of the services of vocationally trained paraprofessionals. Statewide, the staffing of facilities in special education will benefit from this vocational program now being field tested in the area of its origin.

Contribution to Vocational Education:

Since paraprofessionals in special education have a unique vocation, they have unusual needs. They bring to their current work or employment objectives deep concern and consistent motivation, or they would not enter upon or remain with such an arduous occupation. Too often, however, they do not enter the field with skills commensurate to the needs of those they serve. By providing them with a vocationally oriented educational program, this project completes their competency for a life's work. The program combines practical experiential work and scientific certainty, laws and lively activities. It is detailed without being confining; it is loose leaf without being loose ended. It is a PEG program, so that practitioners can peg their practice on their principles. The principles are not theoretical and divorced from practice but are themselves the result of what has been done, is now being done and will be done better by those who henceforth put the principles of special education into practice.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Problem

Vocational education in the area of special education is locally approaching a crisis. Paraprofessionals trained to serve handicapped citizens are in increasingly short supply and until now an adequate curriculum for their training has not been available. As evidence of the extent of the problem, the statement (see p. 16) of the New Jersey Higher Education Council for Special Education, an organization of deans and department heads in special education in the state university and colleges, may be summarized as including the following:

1. It is currently projected that within the next five years there will be insufficient numbers of paraprofessional personnel prepared to work with the handicapped.
2. If certification is mandated for instructional special education paraprofessionals, there will not be sufficient preparation programs available to satisfy this requirement.
3. Current preparation programs do not include specific instruction and/or experience in the use of instructional aides.

The vocational education problem is particularly acute in Burlington County. Within the county more than 100 of the 860 New Jersey special education teacher aides are already functioning. The number exceeds that of every other county in the state and it is from five to fifteen times as many as in adjacent counties. Although the population of the county is not as large as other counties in the state, the population of handicapped is proportionately far greater because of the location of state institutions with the county.

Some instances of the growing need within Burlington County are to be found in:

1. New Lisbon State School is currently staffing nearly 300 direct care positions as the only wholly Intermediate Care Facility for Mental Retardation (ICFMR) in the state.
2. Within the next four years, several projected community and group homes under development by the Division of Mental Retardation in Burlington County will be operational.
3. The opening of John Ossi Vocational School in Medford has increased vocational openings for special needs service personnel.
4. The planned expansion of the Burlington Special Services School District program to support increased enrollment will require increased staff.
5. Increasing client loads at day care centers and adult activity centers warrants increased numbers of direct care staff.
6. The growing impact of P.L. 94-142 with its insistence upon individualized educational programs for each handicapped child will demand improved delivery systems in which paraprofessionals will be an integral part.

The need is present and the problem is acute. Only an appropriate training program will respond to the personal and legal requisites of society.

The vocational education aspect of paraprofessional training in special education is quite specific. Paraprofessionals are trained to a level of competence that provides clients superior service and the paraprofessional appropriate job satisfaction. Of the many paraprofessionals who make a life-time vocation of their position as aides to teachers and who are not merely teachers adjusting to an economic situation, there are a significant number for whom further training is vital. That training to supplement on the job experience is integral to the thoroughness of special education.

The thoroughness of special education programs depends in large measure upon their constant individualized application by skilled paraprofessionals. In that skilled application a vocationally oriented curriculum is an essential element. Hence, if trained paraprofessionals are not available no program in special education, however accurately conceived, can be thorough. The present curriculum is an effort to meet that need with a testable curriculum.

The efficiency of a special education program likewise depends upon the economics provided by trained paraprofessionals. The value of paraprofessionals in the school or agency economy is considerable. When they are used for academic instructional purposes class sizes are allowed to be increased by one-third ($1/3$), typically from fifteen to twenty. [New Jersey Administrative Code 6:28-3:19(c)] They may also be used for supplemental instruction when approved by local school boards, a situation more likely to occur when the paraprofessionals are trained. Moreover, their contribution to activities directly involving handicapped but not restricted to instruction is unlimited.

The thoroughness and efficiency of paraprofessionals services in pre-school and school settings depends upon their being adequately trained. That training is based upon a curriculum which can be developed and evaluated in accord with the local needs of agencies and the standards of excellence of the helping professions. The need for such a curriculum has been met and a beginning of the solution of the problem has been made through the PEG program submitted to the Division of Vocational Education.

2. Objectives:

The prime objective of this project is the provision of a curriculum and program for the education of paraprofessional personnel in special education. The program is designed to that end, titled PEG, to indicate that therein practice is pegged upon principles, is bipartite, to meet two fundamental needs. The project includes a study of the principles and practices of special education and a guided program in personal and professional skills to inculcate or increase paraprofessional competencies.

Since the special education paraprofessional customarily works as a member of a team and under the supervision of a certified special education professional, that subordinate role is a major concern of the project. In a regular classroom that mainstreams handicapped children, the paraprofessional assists the teacher in implementing individual programs and in assisting children to achieve the behavioral and developmental objectives as established by the teacher and special education personnel. Likewise, the classrooms for special needs children, a paraprofessional assists and supports the special educator in the implementation of the Individualized Education Program always mandated and often provided for each child. Primary responsibilities of special education paraprofessionals are varied and usually reflect the expertise of the professional teacher in analyzing the classroom tasks, but the paraprofessional has to be able to assume a proper role for the fulfillment of the tasks. In nonschool or institutional settings, the work of the paraprofessional is that of supplementing and implementing the work of professionals, often in a direct care manner as varied as daily needs. For any of these roles the curriculum which is the objective of this project, prepares any participant.

Objectives subordinate to the prime training objective include preparation of participants in training areas and resources. The training areas are the vocational parameters for paraprofessionals, while the training resources are all those supplemental and enriching any paraprofessional at work.

Areas of training include orientation to a school, center or institution where one is working or will work as a paraprofessional. Such an orientation is a basic consideration in guiding the training of a paraprofessional on and for a job. A full and accurate understanding of policies, facilities, communication channels, opportunities for advancement, rules and regulations which pertain to one's own position are integral to the total program orientations which require attention and understanding by the paraprofessional. Moreover, a paraprofessional has to learn the foundational knowledge and understanding of the standards of performance expected within an ethical framework of personal responsibilities in areas of confidentiality, privacy, the rights of learners, as well as those of their parents and guardians. They should also know the legal basis for the delivery system of special educational services.

As in other human services, stress upon skills in interpersonal communication and relationships in the support role of the paraprofessional are an integral part of this program and one of the objectives of this project. Since close association with professional teachers, psychologists, therapists, and other professionals is to be expected on the job, it is evident that competencies in the area of social, personal and communication skills are required. The development of awareness, perceptiveness and memory, as well as a habit of cooperation and skill at following through with tasks are traits to be developed in a paraprofessional. In addition, the competencies needed to carry out the educational programs developed by a

professional teacher and others are within the learning capacity of paraprofessionals and among the objectives of program participants.

Training resources offered to paraprofessionals are presented as learning objectives in both formal and informal constructs. Since community colleges are expanding their commitment to training of paraprofessionals and they are also using traditional means to attain their objective, namely, certified course sequences and/or associate two-year degree plans, there is a need for appropriate resource material for such plans. By and large, however, throughout the United States, inservice programs are updating and refining the skills of paraprofessionals already in positions. Extensive opportunities are being offered on public television, for example, usually sponsored by the local college or university. The impact of practicum offerings wherein a person learns on the job and gets immediate feedback from a lead teacher cannot be minimized and forms a concern of this program.

All these factors have been reviewed in the design of the PEG program, and its addresses each at the level of its importance and value on the local scene. The PEG program uses the onsite experiences of participants whose work is ready in special education; it uses college courses (PEG I and II), and it uses an individualized program (ForYou), which culminates in a skill oriented training sequence (ECHO).

In the design of the program and in its implementation the contribution of those operating in the field has been a paramount consideration. The program is vocationally directed. Its objectives are work oriented. Yet it is not simply a detailed description of a system for hourly workers who do not rise above routine in their thinking. It is for paraprofessionals who share principles and practice with their professional directors.

3. Definition of Terms

Instead of producing a glossary of terms to make their report intelligible, they produced a separate studytext of terminology used in the field of special education. The text is fifty-eight pages of terms in special education, succinctly and accurately defined, complemented by proper names of thinkers, developers and leaders in special education and related fields. In addition, the nomenclature for major tests often used for exceptional children is provided in lists and brief descriptions. Acronyms for noteworthy programs in special education have also been added. Thus, the program contains, not a glossary for internal use in understanding the project itself, but one of value throughout a life-time in the field. Using the studytext in terminology the paraprofessional will not spout "jargon" but will be familiar with accurate language. Any participant in the program will thereby grow in confidence and be able to define, describe, and communicate conditions, causes, method, techniques and sources in the field of special education.

4. Related Research or Background Information

The project in vocational education of which the PEG program is the product does not readily fit into a standardized format for a research project. In its conception and throughout its gestation two experts in the field of special education were charged with producing from their expertise and consultations a viable curriculum and program for paraprofessionals. They were not asked to explore avenues of approaching their problem but they had a mandate to come to conclusions as rapidly as possible concerning the preferable way to train paraprofessionals for the difficult task of serving students with special needs.

BODY OF REPORT

The PEG program that has been produced for vocational training is a four course sequence for training special education paraprofessionals, appropriately in a community college. The program includes (a) a study of the principles and practices of special education and (b) a guided program in personal and professional growth in paraprofessional skills. The course sequence admits of flexibility in its administration.

PEG I and II (the first and third course) offer studies in the legal basis for the delivery of special educational and related services, familiarity with terminology, and studies in the several exceptionalities which are commonly recognized within special education. Studybooks in each of these areas, together with a Studybank, a resource listing of print and nonprint media designed for individualized study in the principles of education and special education, offer support to PEG I and II. FORYOU (undertaken simultaneously with PEG I) and ECHO (the fourth course) are designed to assist a student in self-study and help any participant achieve a measure of personal and professional growth, particularly in those areas indicated by the self-administered Needs Assessment, FORME. Using the individual's own educational plan, the student will work with a college facilitator and a field facilitator (a school or agency based professional) to develop and refine appropriate needed skills while on a job. Both FORYOU and ECHO are student-initiated and oriented toward peer-level conference work. They allow for the ultimate flexibility in cooperative effort among the three parties involved. An additional feature of the ECHO program is the opportunity given a student to receive video coaching directed to a continuous improvement of on-the-job skills.

At the very beginning of the program, in the OVERVIEW, each participant is given a chart in which are indicated the congruency between expected paraprofessional competencies and the PEG program elements. The enumeration of competencies is based upon the research of the authors of the program, and their resources and carefully indicated, together with the addresses of programs in which the competencies may be found in operation among paraprofessionals. There are six general categories in which a participant may find elements of the PEG program: orientation to the field; ethics and standards; interpersonal relationships; learning atmosphere; selected skills; and descriptions of exceptional citizens.

Elements of the PEG program which correspond to orientation include knowledge of educational programs and facilities and administrative structures, in PEG I as in the FORYOU, descriptions of job opportunities and career advancement and communication channels. In both FORYOU and ECHO there are informative segments in relation to educational objectives, school regulations, school practices and policies, and administrative structures.

In the area of ethics and standards, which are emphasized in PEG I, and repeated in PEG II and FORYOU, there is an exploration of concerns about personal responsibilities, confidentiality and privacy, "P.L. 94-142" N.J.A.C. chapter 26, sec. 503 and 504 Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and similar subjects germane to special education and a paraprofessional.

Throughout the program there are, of course, considerations of interpersonal relationships, but they tend to be emphasised more explicitly in FORYOU and ECHO. Included among the elements with respect to interpersonal relationships are: motivational experiences, communication skills, social and personal skills, understanding the limits of authority, school and community values and dynamics, decision making and problem solving, leadership, initiative and team roles. PEG I and II explore the latter three concerns, and the others are the precise subject of FORYOU and ECHO.

Within the scope of "learning atmosphere", the program discusses, mainly in FORYOU, awareness of teacher's and student's needs in a special education setting, awareness of the effect of positive mental health on the performance of others, importance of structure, use of self as intervener, and evidence of understanding, warmth, and empathy. PEG II and ECHO reinforce the thorough discussion of these concerns in FORYOU.

Since the skills needed in special education, even by a paraprofessional cannot be taught in any sequence of instruction, some have been selected for inclusion in the PEG program. They include: clerical skills, behavior management techniques, observing and recording, resourcefulness in school and community, technical skills with equipment, first aid procedures, academic assistance, supervision of children. These skills are initiated or developed mainly in the FORYOU and ECHO portions of the program.

The awareness of the exceptional citizen is an element that is explicit throughout the PEG program, but it is more the concern of PEG I and II than of FORYOU and ECHO. Within the scope of that competency instruction are included on such elements as: characteristics of various types of exceptional individuals, normal developmental patterns, representative method in teaching and training, leading thinkers in the field, popularly used tests, terminology advocacy groups, and representative agencies. All these elements recur throughout the program several times and in several ways, since they are basic training elements for a paraprofessional.

SUMMARY

The PEG program, complete in its Overview and two of its segments, is the beginning of a thorough training program for paraprofessionals in special education. As it now stands, it is composed of autonomous and integrated elements, and its completion will assure that a field testable edition of a model program will be available to train paraprofessionals in a vocation in which there is great need and many satisfactions.

The single immediate desideratum for the PEG program is its completion. The portions already completed will be field tested at various locations, and the demand for its completion will undoubtedly increase as its value becomes evident. Hence, the sole recommendation of the authors of the program and the staff involved in its production, is that the remaining unfinished elements be allowed to come to production. Had the program been funded for its full and first expected life-span, it would have been an integral program even now. It seems appropriate to all concerned that what has been so well begun, should be brought to completion.